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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 006710

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: KADIMA TAKES BITE OUT OF THREE PARTIES; PLATFORM
CALLS FOR TWO-STATE SOLUTION

REF: TEL AVIV 6673

Classified By: Political Counselor Norman Olsen for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

11. (U) Summary: Prime Minister Sharon's Kadima Party continues to siphon off high-profile politicians from other parties, and its support in the polls is climbing. Labor Party MK and Shimon Peres's close confidante, Dalia Yitzik, announced late November 28 that she is joining Kadima. The nation awaits an announcement expected November 30 by former Labor Party leader Shimon Peres about his political future, with much speculation as to whether he will accept a peace envoy position in a Sharon-led government. At its Knesset faction meeting November 28, Kadima party members agreed on a national platform, which immediately leaked, that calls for the preservation of Israel as a Jewish, democratic state through the establishment of a demilitarized Palestinian state in the territory of "the land of Israel" (read: Gaza and parts of the West Bank). The latest poll shows Kadima would receive 34 Knesset seats if elections were held today, up one seat from last week. Likud would win only 10 seats, down from 13 last week, ranking fourth, after Kadima, Labor and Shas. End Summary.

12. (C) Political Shifts in Shinui, Labor, and Likud to Kadima

-- Sources close to former Labor leader Shimon Peres say that he is likely to align himself, but not actually join, the Kadima Party, and accept a position as some sort of peace envoy in any future Sharon-led government. Peres said he will announce his decision November 30.

-- Labor MK and former Minister of Communications Dalia Itzik, a close confidante of Peres, announced late November 28 that she is leaving the Labor Party to join Kadima. Some observers speculate that Peres conditioned his political support for Kadima on Sharon offering Itzik a choice position in Kadima.

-- Labor MK and former Environment Minister Shalom Simhon is also considering whether to leave Labor to join Kadima.

-- One of the Shinui Party's founders, Uriel Reichman, confirmed November 29 that he is joining Kadima (reftel). Shinui MK Ilan Shalgi told Poloff November 29 that Sharon offered Reichman the Ministry of Education portfolio in any future Sharon government. He said that Reichman's move is a setback for Shinui leader Lapid.

-- Responding to an official invitation, 72 Likud, Labor and non-affiliated mayors and heads of regional councils from around the country attended a meeting with Sharon at his residence to discuss the Kadima Party. Some half of those who attended reportedly announced they intend to join the Kadima party.

-- Meretz MK Zehava Gal-On told Poloff November 29 that Meretz leader Yossi Beilin's November 27 announcement of his party's willingness to join Kadima was "premature" (see reftel). She stressed that Beilin made the announcement without the party's agreement.

13. (U) Labor Reels in a Public Figure

-- The media has had a lovefest covering Channel Two reporter Sheli Yehimovitch's move to join the Labor Party. Television news broadcasts November 29 devoted long segments showing the popular Yehimovitch arriving at Labor Party headquarters, being escorted into Peretz's office, and sitting cozily with Peretz on the office couch with his arm around her. Peretz's search for prominent personalities from outside the Knesset to join his party list could threaten the seats of current Labor MKs.

14. (U) Kadima Announces Simple Election Platform

-- The Kadima faction platform as leaked to the media calls for the establishment of a demilitarized Palestinian state alongside Israel in order to preserve Israel's Jewish majority and its democratic nature.

-- The Kadima platform also calls for the preservation of an undivided Jerusalem and retention of major West Bank settlement blocs under Israeli control.

-- The platform also states that the roadmap will be a part of Kadima's national agenda and that the establishment of a Palestinian state will be achieved in stages, the first of which will include the dismantling of terrorist organizations, collecting firearms, implementing security reforms in the Palestinian Authority and preventing incitement.

-- The platform alludes to the need for political reforms, including the introduction of constituency-based elections and open primaries for Knesset members and the premiership.

15. (U) Latest Polls Show Likud Losing Ground

-- A Dahaf Polling Institute poll released November 30 shows that if elections were to be held today, Likud would garner only 10 Knesset seats, down to one quarter of its current number. The polls showed that even the Shas Party would out-rank Likud, with 11 seats.

-- According to the Dahaf poll, Kadima would win 34 Knesset seats, up one seat from last week's poll figures; the Labor Party would receive 27 seats, also up one seat from last week's survey.

-- The poll shows Shinui support shrinking further, down to five seats from the six indicated in last week's poll. Shinui won 15 seats in the last election.

16. (C) Parties Prepare for Primaries.

-- National Religious Party primaries are scheduled for January 3, according to NRP MK Shaul Yahalom. Yahalom told Poloff November 29 that the NRP and the National Union (NU) will be submitting a united list for the elections. He dismissed speculation that the other religious parties, Shas and United Torah Judaism, would join with the NRP and NU to form a broader religious/right-wing political base.

-- Yahalom also commented that Avigdor Lieberman, leader of the Yisrael Beiteinu party, would focus on the secular Russian vote rather than marry up with the right-wing religious parties.

-- Shinui MK Ilan Shalgi told Poloff that Shinui's 169-member council will choose the party list January 19. Shalgi noted he is number three on the list, after Shinui leader Tommy Lapid and MK Avraham Poraz. He commented that Shinui will aim to attract the secular middle class, and asserted that his party would be a good partner for Sharon.

-- Shalgi told Poloff November 29 that he will give a speech to the Knesset plenary November 30, in which he will advocate that the GOI continue to take unilateral actions with regard to its borders. He advocated that Israel retain the large West Bank settlement blocs, including Ariel.

-- Likud MK Gilad Erdan told Poloff that nothing major will transpire within Likud before the party chairman is chosen in leadership primaries scheduled for December 19. He commented that suspicion within the party exists about who from Likud will jump next to Sharon's ship.

17. (U) Election preparations.

-- The Population Administration announced November 27 that in the upcoming elections, over five million people are registered to vote.

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JONES